

flect on the fact that the traditional German right and the criminals who act out its fantasies of ethnic purity dislike the United States. We are, in their view, "a mongrel society." All the more reason to send as our next ambassador someone who is black, Jewish or a woman, with instructions to show solidarity with the Germans who insist that Germany must assume the burdens of a multicultural society. In the end, however, it is their fight. □

■ ITALY WITHOUT CLICHÉS

The Fall of the Cold War Order

LUCIA ANNUNZIATA

Surprise. A "revolution" is going on in the country of Raphael (the artist) and Valentino (the tailor). A nation that seems more appreciated for its food than for its politics has recently moved from the travel pages of American newspapers to the "trouble spot" location on the front page. The attention is largely deserved: The worst political crisis since World War II has been gripping Italy for months now, and the political system seems all but on the edge of collapse.

For all the attention, American reporters don't get the full story. A haze of sentiment has traditionally clouded America's perception of Italy: Americans love the country, but it is a love based on cliché. From Henry James to Edith Wharton, from Hemingway to Katharine Hepburn, foreigners for centuries identified Italy as the setting for the "experience" of beauty and art, the exploration of the senses, the expansion of one's soul. But this love has never been extended to the real country, which has never been taken seriously in any other respect. Not even the past ten years of American upper-class consumerism, which has celebrated Italian food, fashion, design and movies, have changed the basic stereotype of Italy as a corrupt country and a minor player in the international political arena.

The current upheaval in Italy is so urgent and relevant to the United States that it's time to sweep away the clichés. What is happening in the real Italy is one more useful lesson on a central theme of the American agenda: the dying order of the cold war. What is now crumbling in Italy is, in effect, the political system created there almost single-handedly by the United States government at the end of World War II. The Italian crisis is nothing less than the symbolic equivalent of the fall of the Berlin wall. Without keeping this idea in mind, it is almost impossible fully to understand the nature of the current events [see Daniel Singer, "Italy's Sum-

mer of Discontent," August 31/September 7, 1992].

The current crisis is a scandal of homeric proportions: One-third of the Parliament, including the former Justice Minister and the once-powerful head of the Socialist Party, is under investigation for corruption—specifically, for accepting bribes or kickbacks in the form of contributions to individuals or political parties in exchange for granting public contracts. Nor is the private sector spared: The number-three executive of one of the largest corporations in the country, Fiat, is also under suspicion. On March 11 the heads of three subsidiaries of ENI, the enormous state energy conglomerate, were arrested. According to the judges who started the investigation that uncovered the scandal—an investigation whose popular nickname, *mani pulite* (clean hands), says a lot about the climate of the country—as many as 100,000 politicians and well-known professionals could be involved.

At the same time, a defiant Mafia is brutally challenging the state: Prosecutors, some of whom are well known in the American judicial system for their work against crime, have been murdered; so have ordinary citizens who denounce the Mafia. The recent arrest of the most important Mafia boss, Toto Riina, has been a turning point and is impressive proof of efficiency in the anticrime battles, similar to operation *mani pulite*.

Spreading disaffection among the citizenry is rocking the political system. Fueled by the angry mood, new parties have entered the political arena. The "leagues," based primarily in the north, have strong racist overtones, and they draw their success from a general rejection of all the mainstream political parties.

On the other hand, corruption has always been a familiar feature of Italian political life. So, one could ask, aside from the magnitude of it, what else is new? What is "new" is that for the first time since the war this corruption is being prosecuted. The exposure of it, which is eroding the legitimacy of political institutions, has been possible precisely because the cold war equilibrium was shattered.

The crisis began with the April 1992 national election, when the governing coalition received the lowest level of support since the end of the war. In the Chamber of Deputies it lost twenty-eight seats, falling to 49 percent of the national vote; in the vote for Senate candidates it got only 43 percent.

Angelo Codevilla, an American expert on Italy who has worked with many U.S. administrations, called this result "revolutionary" in *Foreign Affairs*. The Italian leaders, Codevilla wrote, "appeared on television with shell-shocked looks and mutters reminiscent of Soviet officials in August 1991." The word "revolution" was also used more recently by *The Economist* and *The New York Times*.

The revolution they refer to is easily defined. For the first time since the war, the Christian Democrats, who have traditionally held power with the help of the Socialist Party, face the impossibility of renewing this alliance. Nor is any other party strong enough to take the lead in forming a new coalition. The former Communists, now known as the Democratic Party of the Left, have themselves lost a large share of the electorate.

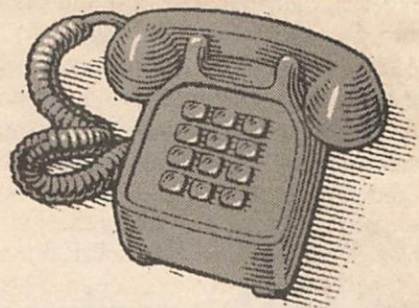
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In this very model of a welfare society, however, many citizens fear the future and resent claims upon them. Not so long ago, the westerners welcomed union with their eastern brethren, whom they saw as victims of history. Now they think of the easterners as self-pitying incompetents, if not parasites. Traumatized by the past, new postwar generations in the west renounced chauvinism and militarism. During the cold war, mass peace movements and government policies of rapprochement with the Soviet bloc had strong support. The citizens of the former Federal Republic viewed integration into Western Europe as indispensable to democracy and prosperity.

Now increasing numbers worry about the real symbol of the nation: not the ferocious eagle but the hard German mark. The German public is indignant because it may have to pay more for bananas as a result of European Community policies; support for European union has seriously diminished. The millions of radical democrats who thrived in the Federal Republic (East German dissidents, now all but forgotten, were their counterparts) must now devote all their energies to a desperate and uncoordinated struggle against a new army of violent young barbarians. The democrats fear that the families living next to them may be on the barbarians' side.

The municipal elections in Hesse, then, may point to a very unstable future. The Christian Democrats may move sharply to the right to win over those who voted for the Republicans. That may cause a split in the party, since some of its most prominent leaders would oppose such a course. The many Social Democratic voters from the working class who voted Republican represent a huge problem for the S.P.D. It cannot and will not betray its own traditions of democracy and human rights, but it is incapable of a strong counterattack on this or any other front. The Social Democratic leader and chancellor candidate, Minister President Björn Engholm of Schleswig-Holstein, is in any event now beset by a scandal involving supposed payoffs to a political informer. He may abandon the party leadership to Gerhard Schröder, the Minister President of Lower Saxony. Schröder presides over a coalition with the Greens and gets on well with industry in his state. Unlike most Social Democratic leaders, he actually comes from the working class and attended university after a decade working in a factory. Outspoken and tough, he seems to be the German Bill Clinton the party longs for—he is a brilliant tactician. But the party lacks a larger economic and social program and, worse yet, seems devoid of moral energy. The Social Democrats had hoped to score large gains in the east. But party loyalties are minimal there, and the Republicans may make a strong showing. Chancellor Kohl, however unpopular, clearly calculates that he can somehow float on top of the debris of whatever social explosion occurs. He has just persuaded the S.P.D. to accept a long-term economic plan on terms electorally favorable to him.

In these circumstances the exhortations by the American foreign policy elite—that Germany assume its “responsibilities” by sending troops to participate in international peace-keeping operations—border on the grotesque. The primary responsibility of the Germans is to overcome the internal threat to democracy. The Clinton Administration should re-



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The uncovering of the scandal and the resurgence of Mafia violence started for the same reason: the weakening of the moral authority of the state. Both the exposure of corruption and the attack on the anti-Mafia judges became possible because of it. And what started this weakening process goes to the heart of the matter in Italy.

The nature of the Italian government has puzzled observers for years. Since the end of World War II, Italy has averaged a new government almost every year (the present is the fifty-first), each promptly replaced by another one formed not only by the same coalition but by the very same politicians. In fact, the longevity of Italian politicians is somewhat legendary.

This paradoxical situation has been interpreted by foreign observers as, to put it benignly, a "farce." Yet this farcical government was also very effective: "The old system has served the country well," writes *The Economist*, "saving it from political extremism and transforming it from a poor and backward country into the world's fifth-biggest economy."

But this is exactly the nature of the Italian political system: It has worked by being both in turmoil and unchangeable, corrupt yet efficient. For almost five decades, paralysis and farce have been not the "underdeveloped" face of a modern nation but two faces of the same coin. This paradox has been our Berlin wall.

It had its origin in U.S. foreign policy in Europe right after the war. At the time, Italy played as pivotal a role as Germany's in Americans' shaping of strategy in the cold war. Both of them were front-line nations in the struggle with the Soviet Union. In the early years of this confrontation, Italy was an important battlefield. The United States intervened in the 1948 Italian election to exclude the Communist Party from the government. That intervention, a combination of diplomatic and intelligence pressures (i.e., a lot of clandestine

money poured into the coffers of the Christian Democrats), was in fact the first covert operation undertaken by the U.S. government in the cold war era. Washington considered it so successful that it became a model for subsequent interventions throughout the world. Since then, Italy's development has been dramatically determined by its role as a field of confrontation between the superpowers.

The system created in 1948 was a monolithic structure. As Codevilla says, "Italian politics for some forty years beginning in October 1947 was overshadowed by one question: Will communists rule Italy or not? Since 1947 the Christian Democratic Party, secure in the knowledge that it was the indispensable alternative to communism (the self-described 'anticommunist dike'), hardly had to campaign, much less worry that anyone could muster enough of the public's energies to reform the system. Thus for nearly half a century cabinets have risen and fallen, policy has lurched left or right, careers and fortunes have been made and lost, strictly by deals made among factional potentates. The voters have been spectators."

Politicians could steal, could give favors to the Mafia in return for votes, but they operated safely under the umbrella of anticommunism. The United States made sure again and again that no alternative to the ruling class could be offered. The last "red scare" for Italy occurred in the 1970s and it drove Henry Kissinger wild, but it drove Italy into even greater craziness, bringing it to the point of civil war, sparked by terrorism. In those years a large portion of Italian society demanded political reforms. It was led by the Communist Party but it was hardly a revolutionary movement. The party was already on the so-called Eurocommunism track, and willing to accept parliamentary institutions and NATO. But it was still Communist, and the Iron Curtain was still there. The aborted demands for reform festered and turned into that great disease, terrorism, which ravaged Italy for almost a decade.

The Italian ruling class put in place forty-five years ago by the United States has proved itself over and over again a loyal ally—maybe too loyal. It has served America with a fervor unmatched even by Third World client regimes. American military bases and missiles have been hosted on Italian soil with the support even of the Communist Party. Italy's strategic location in the Mediterranean has made it a key instrument in American foreign policy—secret and open—particularly with respect to the Arab world, acting very often as mediator, and even errand boy, for the U.S. administration. (See the recent case of the Atlanta branch of the Banca Nazionale del Lavoro, which the Bush Administration used to finance Iraq secretly before the invasion of Kuwait.)

Italy has been such a good ally that many times it has appeared to be a servant, which helps explain the condescension in America's attitude toward us. This period is now over. Of course, the "revolution" going on in Italy now seems irrelevant to the United States. With the end of the cold war, some former allies are of no use anymore. Yet Italy is again at the center of a Europe in flux, feeling reverberations from the Balkan war, a demoralized united Germany and a perpetually unstable Middle East. The Mediterranean remains a focal point of international conflict, and any policy to stabilize this part of the world must still pass through Rome. □



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